

# Media Release



21 May 2014

## **Life just gets harder for marginalised Australians Salvos research shows the real face of Australian poverty**

A nationwide survey of around 2,500 Salvation Army welfare clients reveals a harrowing snapshot of the realities of daily life for those living on the margins - vulnerable, difficult lives which The Salvation Army believes are about to get even harder in light of the recent Federal budget.

As The Salvation Army today releases the findings of its annual Economic and Social Impact Survey (ESIS), the Salvos are gravely concerned the federal government has ignored the needs of the most vulnerable Australians in the search for budget savings.

“Of particular concern is the \$7 Medicare co-contribution fee, which ignores the economic circumstances of the poor,” said Major Bruce Harmer of The Salvation Army. “The reality of life for those we assist is that 24% of those surveyed for our ESIS report already couldn’t afford medical treatment when needed, and 34% were unable to buy medicines prescribed by the doctor. The \$7 fee might just tip more of them over into avoiding a basic doctor’s visit or essential pathology.

“While for most Australians a fee of \$7 might not sound like much, for someone who lives on less than \$35 per day, including their housing costs, this is yet another burden on their already fragile financial situation,” Major Harmer said.

“Twenty-nine per cent of those we surveyed said they already did not have a secure or decent home, and 14% were homeless or lived in unstable accommodation. A significantly higher proportion of Newstart recipients were homeless or in unstable accommodation (26%) compared to the full population of those surveyed (14%).”

The Salvation Army’s survey of 2485 clients across 237 Salvation Army community support services shows that many are already struggling to afford basic necessities for themselves and their families:

- 1 in 4 is unable to afford a substantial meal at least once a day;
- 28% said they have had to live without heating in at least one room in the house throughout winter;
- 38% of participants did not have regular social contact with people, leading to a feeling of isolation and loneliness, with 47% reporting they were unable to find someone to help them when needed; and
- 91% of respondents had limited or no savings for emergencies.

Another area of real concern for The Salvation Army is the announced changes to the Newstart and Youth Allowance payments, with job seekers under the age of 30 facing far more stringent requirements.

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Major Harmer said: “The realities of unemployment can be incredibly complex, with many of those we assist facing multiple barriers to employment. For example, 38% of those we surveyed had health problems or disabilities as barriers; 30% had responsibilities as parents or carers that made job seeking more difficult; for 12%, age was a barrier (too old or too young); 11% didn’t have the education, training or skills required; and 9% didn’t have enough work experience.

“We are also concerned the budget did not specify ongoing funding commitments in the areas of emergency relief (community welfare services) and financial counselling which are fundamental to The Salvation Army’s support of disadvantaged and marginalised Australians.

“The reality is that people on low incomes are not weighing up the economics of whether or not they will go on an overseas holiday, but instead they will be weighing up whether or not they have the money to see the doctor when necessary or using that \$7 to pay for bread to feed themselves or their family for the week. When individuals and families live at or below the poverty-line, these are the sorts of economic decisions they are forced to make.

“Added pressures on families generally, including cuts to family benefits and increasing fuel costs, could mean a flow on effect to organisations like ours and more people turning up for assistance at a range of our services, including homelessness services, welfare services and financial counselling.

“People are regularly going without items, services and activities that are part of everyday living and important for full participation in community life such as adequate standards of housing, educational resources and activities for children, access to health and a capacity to engage in social activities,” Major Harmer said.

“Despite their struggles many Salvation Army clients want to be able to provide a more sustained and adequate standard of living for themselves and their children which is why the Red Shield Appeal is so important.”

To donate to the Red Shield Appeal please call **13 SALVOS** (13 72 58), online at **salvos.org.au**, or in person at any **Westpac Bank** branch or by posting a cheque to **PO Box 9888 in your capital city**.

**ENDS**

**For further information or to organise media interviews, please contact**

The Salvation Army Media Office – (02) 9266 9820 (diverts after hours)